

one person in the United States of America standing between us and more job creation, and it is the resident of the White House, President Obama.

I wish to turn it over to the organizer of this event, Senator JOHANNIS.

Mr. JOHANNIS. Madam President, I end my comments today by saying to all of my fellow Senators, thank you so very much for coming to the floor today and making the case. There is an old saying in a profession I used to be engaged in: I rest my case. Well, after hearing from these fine gentlemen about the importance of these agreements and why we need to have the President send them here, I rest my case. It is going to improve job creation. It is going to improve our opportunity to export our products. It is going to level the playing field. It is going to give our producers the opportunity to reclaim market share that has been lost while we have been waiting for these agreements to come here.

The final point I wish to make is this. I come from a State where unemployment is right above 4 percent. In this recession in Nebraska, unemployment never went over 5 percent. In fact, as I was doing my townhall meetings across the State, I had members of my business community coming to me and saying: One of the challenges we are facing is finding the workers for the jobs we are creating. Therefore, in my State, trade adjustment assistance would not be the high priority it is in many States. Notwithstanding that fact, when Senator BLUNT came to me and said, look, the President is insisting on trade adjustment assistance as a condition to move these agreements and would I sign on to a letter that will back trade adjustment assistance, I said I would. Why? Because the trade agreements are important to us.

It is my hope that after the many speeches we have all given—the many speeches I have given on the importance of these agreements not only on the Senate floor but across this country—the President is listening and will finally send us these agreements so we can work with the President. We can join forces on these agreements and do everything we can to get the votes in the Senate and in the House to pass them and to put them on his desk and create 250,000 new jobs.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Connecticut.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, over the past 2 weeks, I have traveled the State of Connecticut, as the Presiding Officer has done in the State of New York, and she has described eloquently the damage she has seen in her State. I have seen much the same in mine. I have seen the destruction of small businesses, of homes; rivers swelling, flooding of historic dimensions causing significant destruction; the wind and rain striking Con-

necticut with a fury, its ferocity virtually unmatched in recent memory.

I met with families and community leaders, farmers and small businesses, about the help they will need to rebuild their homes and their businesses and their lives and their livelihoods. It is a powerful and moving struggle. The citizens of Connecticut, similar to the citizens of New York and others struck by this storm, have acted with determination and resolve, not with desperation or despair. They are determined and dedicated to rebuild and recover from this storm, but they need the help that is provided by FEMA. We are here, hopefully in a bipartisan effort, to make sure these communities and others like them throughout the Northeast and throughout the United States have the help and the real consequential aid they need to make this recovery in rebuilding their lives.

The early estimates suggest that the damage caused by Irene could reach more than \$10 billion, making it one of the 10 costliest disasters in U.S. history. The suffering and real sadness of Connecticut citizens gives us a bond and a cause in common with millions of other Americans who have suffered from hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and other natural disasters across the country. This year alone, we have seen flooding on the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and other rivers in the Midwest, devastating tornadoes in the South, wildfires in the South and West, and now Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee.

In times of natural disaster, Americans come together. In times when they face crises, Americans rally as neighbors, as a community. Regardless of specific States where they live, they come together to rebuild their homes, to make common cause, to recognize our bonds as a nation. The spirit of our Nation is that we put people above politics every time, without exception; that we provide disaster relief for victims, such as Connecticut residents now, and with the resources they need to rebuild.

Currently, FEMA is funding disaster relief for over 550 disasters, including 29 in Oklahoma, 21 in Kentucky, 17 in Texas, 19 in Mississippi, and 18 in Kansas. Yet 2 weeks ago, House majority leader ERIC CANTOR stated that relief funds for Hurricane Irene would need to be offset by savings found elsewhere in the Federal budget. I reject that contention and so should this body and my colleagues from those States I have just named and all the other States in the Union. In fact, all but a handful or less have received and are receiving disaster relief just since January of this year.

We need to do everything we can to put Connecticut and America back to work, to make sure our economy moves forward again, to create jobs, and to reduce the deficit. Yes, we need to reduce the deficit and the debt and cut unnecessary and wasteful spending. However, we cannot permit Wash-

ington politics to create a legislative logjam and gridlock that bogs down these efforts for disaster relief. The need is too urgent for thousands of families and businesses in Connecticut and around the country that have been devastated by these unprecedented floods and other natural disasters, such as hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and tornadoes.

Turning disaster assistance into a political football is unacceptable and unconscionable. It is a recipe for gridlock and it is just plain wrong. It is wrong and a disservice to the men and women whose homes and businesses have been hit by the forces of nature that are unpredictable and unpreventable. Now they are attempting to rebuild their lives, and we owe it to them to match their courage and resilience with efforts from FEMA.

We can't prevent those hurricanes or tornadoes or wildfires, but we can step forward when these disasters occur and lend a hand to our neighbors, as we have done throughout our history, and we can provide these communities with the real resources they need to recover, without distinguishing between what State or what part of the country.

There is one story from Connecticut which I think tells a lot about the choices we face right now. Mel Goldstein and his wife Arlene, whose home was completely destroyed by flooding caused by Hurricane Irene, are being told their homeowners insurance will not cover the damage. Their only hope of recovery is FEMA flood insurance and other FEMA assistance. Right now, they are using their savings to stay in a hotel while they rebuild their lives. Mel is one of the best known weathermen in the State of Connecticut. He is an icon in the broadcasting world and a hero to many of us for his struggle against cancer. His treatment in this unstable environment at this point in his recovery adds an unnecessary toll and stress to their lives. As we have in the past, we must come together to help folks such as Arlene and Mel Goldstein move on after the unthinkable happens in their lives. The unthinkable happened to them and to many of their neighbors in East Haven along the shores of Connecticut.

I have heard their voices and seen their faces throughout our State, in communities big and small, where flooding has put a small business out of business and where homes have been destroyed and people are living in shelters or with their neighbors or were for awhile. These kinds of human stories are part of the fabric of the larger story we need to recognize. I hope my colleagues will come together, as we did on the vote yesterday, to approve this measure. The vote yesterday signaled perhaps a return to the bipartisanship that should prevail when the Nation confronts crisis and disaster. Our No. 1 goal, which should be a bipartisan goal, must be to deliver help to our fellow Americans as quickly as possible.

Thank you. I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUMENTHAL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee left a trail of devastation across New York State. I saw firsthand the impact they left on our communities: hundreds of families living in shelters, complete homes destroyed, belongings piled up on people's front yards, small businesses uncertain whether they would even reopen and worrying about whether they could hire back their employees, farms that had no feed for livestock for days, crops and livelihoods vanishing without any trace in a single day, crumbling bridges, washed-out roads, heating oil soaking into buildings and the ground. I was born and raised in upstate New York, and I can say we have never seen this kind of devastation—certainly not in my lifetime.

America has always stood by those who have suffered greatly from disaster and we have always helped them to rebuild. We have an obligation to these families, businesses, and farmers to help them rebuild today.

This picture is of downtown Binghamton. I met with hundreds of families displaced and placed in a Red Cross shelter at the University of Binghamton. They were on day four at the shelter, unclear if they would be able to see what was left of their homes.

I can't fully describe the worry and fear in the eyes of parents who are in a shelter with their children. I talked to one mother who has 10 children, the youngest of whom was 2 years old, trying desperately to keep them fed, keep them safe but literally having no sense of when she could return to her home and what it would look like when she returned.

I talked to one father whose daughter turned 13 years old that day in the shelter and his worry was mostly: I don't know what is in front of us. I don't know when we will be able to go home. I don't know how much has been destroyed, and I don't know how I will rebuild.

One parent I talked to was a young mother. She held a 6-week-old infant in her arms, and she said to me: I have everything I need right here. That exemplified the courage of Americans when they fight through suffering—the strength of New Yorkers that they will pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and make the difference. But we in Washington must help.

In Schoharie County, on the main street of the villages of both Schoharie and Middleburgh, every single home was flooded. The water mark was at

about 7 feet. As you drive down the main street and begin to talk to the business owners and the families, you can see there was not one left untouched. Every piece of these families' belongings is literally on the front lawns of these homes and businesses.

But I watched these business owners begin to rebuild. I could see them literally bringing the mud from the basements, bringing the mud from their ground floors, pulling down all the drywall because obviously the damage was so great it would cause long-lasting damage. People are very worried about how they can make sure their business is safe.

This is just a snapshot right here in this picture of the town of Middleburgh. This is the farming community within Schoharie County. These farmers have lost everything. I can tell you, the water was so strong, the surge was so great, it literally took trees out of the ground, completely uprooted and overturned. The crops that we could see on this farm—they were so covered with silt from the river, we could not even recognize what kind of crops they were. I saw potatoes that had been uprooted from the ground all over the road. That farmer could salvage nothing of their farm.

We had one farmer who came down to meet with me because her cows were stranded. They had 800 cows stuck because the roads had been completely washed out. They had no way to get feed up to those cows. They had no way to deal with manure and dump all the milk that had to be destroyed. They needed a rescue effort. Because of the efforts of our Governor—he reacted quickly—our National Guard got up there, got food and water up to those farmers, they fixed the road, and the feed was delivered. But this is the kind of reaction we need from government. This is why the Federal Government must be there to help and protect these families and businesses.

Our next picture is of Greene County. In Greene County, waters rushed down the main street of Windham—this is a picture of Windham—and destroyed all businesses in its wake. The homes of families were also destroyed. There was absolute destruction throughout Greene County.

I talked to just one business owner, and she had a business for children's clothing, children's needs, children's toys. She had just a couple employees, but she said: I have nothing to rebuild. I have no way that I can rebuild my business. I don't think I could rehire those employees.

So there is the feeling of hopelessness and worry and dread and concern on top of a very tough economy anyway. These are the businesses and families and farmers we need to help because we need them to rebuild. We need them to have the ability to rehire those employees, to produce food for our families, to make sure we have thriving communities once again.

The last picture I wish to show is of Keene, up in the North Country. In

Keene, the river rose 22 feet above the flood stage, washing out roads and bridges, and it left much of the town actually stranded for days. Half the town's firehouse was ripped apart and swept away by the river. Up in the High Peaks, the rain came down so hard it brought huge chunks of the mountainside with it, creating slides that have changed the face of the Adirondacks for generations.

As you can see, this is just four communities. Throughout New York State—the North Country, the Capital Region, the Mohawk Valley, the Hudson Valley, the Southern Tier, and Long Island—no one can question the absolute devastation that these storms have left in our communities. We must stand with them in their greatest time of need.

Federal assistance is essential to help these families, these farmers, these businesses, and communities not only recover but rebuild and be stronger than they were before.

We need immediate funding for FEMA and the USDA disaster assistance to provide relief for these communities all across New York and for all the other States that were affected by these storms.

SYRIA SANCTIONS ACT OF 2011

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I would now like to address a second issue that is causing me very grave concern. I would like to talk for a moment about a piece of legislation I have introduced with Senators KIRK and LIEBERMAN to toughen the sanctions on Syria.

Syrian President Assad has killed over 2,000 of his own people in an alarming torrent of violence from one of the world's most repressive regimes—2,200 people are estimated to have died so far.

Assad's aggression against the Syrian people is matched by his subversive aggression abroad. His regime is a state sponsor of terrorism, one of Iran's closest allies, and a key backer of Hamas and Hezbollah. Assad's regime has for years helped foreign fighters enter Iraq and kill our U.S. soldiers.

In response to this violent crackdown, I introduced the bipartisan Syria Sanctions Act of 2011 to hold Assad's regime accountable. This legislation would block access to the U.S. market for companies that invest in Syria's energy sector, purchase the county's oil, and sell gasoline to Syria. This sanction is critical, since Syria's energy sector accounts for one-third of that state's revenue.

I ask my colleagues to sponsor S. 1472 and send a clear message to Syria that until the Assad regime responds to the democratic urging of its people, halts its nuclear development, and ends support for terrorism, Syria will not and should not have access to the global economy, and any company that does business with Syria will no longer have access to the global economy.